

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ROME 08174 01 OF 02 181751Z
ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 8174

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IT, PINT
SUBJECT: POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN ITALY

SUMMARY: ITALIANS SEE THE CURRENT WAVE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AS A THREAT TO THE STATE. THE VIOLENCE COMES PRIMARILY FROM THE ALIENATED MIDDLE CLASS YOUTH. MANY BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE AIDED AND STIMULATED BY EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS, PROBABLY THE CZECHS. WHILE THE PROBLEM IS SERIOUS, IT DOES NOT NOW APPEAR LIKELY TO RESULT IN AN IMMINENT THREAT TO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS MAINLY BECAUSE THE PUBLIC IS OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSED TO THE PRESENT VIOLENCE. POLITICALLY, THE VIOLENCE IS MOVING THE SPECTRUM SOMEWHAT TO THE RIGHT. IT POSES SERIOUS SHORT-TERM PROBLEMS FOR THE PCI, PSI, AND RADICALS.
END SUMMARY.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 ROME 08174 01 OF 02 181751Z

1. THE HEADLINES OF ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS, FROM RIGHT TO LEFT, DAILY CHARACTERIZE ITALY'S GROWING PUBLIC VIOLENCE AS AN IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF ITALY'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. IN THE PAST, MANY HAVE SEEN SUCH A THREAT IN THE GROWING STRENGTH OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI), BUT TODAY THE COMMUNISTS ARE JOINING IN THE CRIES OF ALARM. THE

ALARMING INCREASE IN CRIME (OVER 50 PERCENT IN THE PAST YEAR), MUCH OF IT POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, HAS IN RECENT WEEKS AND MONTHS BEEN MAGNIFIED BY MASS CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC ORDER. PITCHED BATTLES IN THE STREETS BETWEEN POLICE AND DEMONSTRATORS AND DEATHS OF POLICEMEN, BYSTANDERS, AND "DEMONSTRATORS," HAVE BECOME ALMOST DAILY NEWS IN ITALY'S BIG CITIES. THE OBVIOUS QUESTIONS (WHY? WHO? HOW SERIOUS IT IS?) ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO ANSWER BECAUSE SOLID INFORMATION IS SCARCE. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS ATTEMPT SOME ANSWERS.

2. WHO AND WHY: PARTICIPANTS IN THE VIOLENT PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY YOUNG AND OVERWHELMINGLY MIDDLE AND UPPER MIDDLE CLASS. THE DEMONSTRATIONS ALMOST INVARIABLY START IN OR ARE PLANNED WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES. THE IDENTIFIABLE LEADERS BELONG TO A VARIETY OF POLITICAL GROUPS (MOVIMENTO STUDENTESCO, AVANGUARDIA OPERAIA, LOTTA CONTINUA, MANIFESTO, ETC.), SOME OF WHICH ARE AVOWEDLY MARXIST AND SOME ARE NOT. THEY ARE AN ODD MIXTURE OF RADICAL ICONOCLASTS WHO ARE UNITED IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE "FASCIST, BOURGEOIS, CAPITALIST SOCIETY" IN WHICH THEY LIVE, BUT WHO DO NOT SHARE ANY DISCERNIBLE VISION OF THE SOCIETY THEY WOULD LIKE TO PUT IN ITS PLACE.

THESE STUDENTS (AND EX-STUDENTS), AND THEIR PREDECESSORS FOR THE LAST 10-15 YEARS, HAVE BEEN ON THE WHOLE FIRM AND ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS OF THE PCI. THEIR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PCI WANED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ROME 08174 01 OF 02 181751Z

1976 ELECTIONS WHEN THE PCI DECIDED TO SUPPORT (BY ABSTENTION) A DC MINORITY GOVERNMENT. MOST OF THE WORLD SAW THAT PCI DECISION AS A TACTICAL MOVE (SALAMI SLICING STYLE) TOWARD THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE OR, BY THOSE MORE GENEROUSLY INCLINED, AS A TENTATIVE BUT TANGIBLE FIRST STEP TOWARD A CONVERSION TO WESTERN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY. THE STUDENTS, WHOEVER, SAW IT AS AN ABANDONMENT OF THE REVOLUTION AND AS A SELLING OUT TO BOURGEOIS CAPITALISM. ONE EXAMPLE WILL PERHAPS DEMONSTRATE WHY THE STUDENTS TENDED TO SEE IT IN SUCH STARK TERMS: JUST TWO YEARS AGO THE PCI WAS CAMPAIGNING TO DISARM THE POLICE WHO WERE CHARACTERIZED AS "FASCIST PIGS" AND AS THE ENEMIES OF THE "PEOPLE." DOZENS OF PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS AND MARCHES WERE HELD IN SUPPORT OF THIS THEME. TODAY, THE PCI (AND CGIL) IS ONE OF THE STAUCHEST DEFENDERS OF THE POLICE AND, IN THAT GUISE, IS PICTURING ITSELF AS A DEFENDER OF DEMOCRACY.

3. THE WHY IS A MORE DIFFICULT QUESTION. THE SIMPLE

ANSWER, WHICH IS PROBABLY CLOSEST TO THE TRUTH, IS THAT THE CPI (AND THE ITALIAN LEFT IN GENERAL) TAUGHT THE YOUNG TOO WELL. SINCE WORLD WAR II (IF NOT SINCE THE DAYS OF ANCIENT ROME), THE STREET DEMONSTRATION HAS BEEN CULTIVATED AS A STANDARD METHOD OF POLITICAL ACTION BY THE ITALIAN LEFT. WITH GROWING PCI AND RADICAL LEFT INFLUENCE IN THE SCHOOLS AND THE MEDIA, THE NEED FOR REVOLUTION AND CHANGE HAVE BEEN A CONSTANT THEME AND THE STATE AND THE DC(WHICH RAN THE STATE) WERE THE ENEMY. IN SHORT, THE PCI STARTED AND CONSTANTLY NOURISHED A PROCESS THAT IT NOW FINDS INCONVENIENT AND CANNOT TURN OFF.

4. APART FROM IDEOLOGICAL TRAINING OR CONDITIONING, THE YOUNG (PARTICULARLY THOSE IN THE UNIVERSITIES) ARE FACED WITH PROFOUND FRUSTRATIONS WHICH SEEM (TO THEM) TO COME FROM SOCIETY, ITSELF. UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG RECENT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 ROME 08174 01 OF 02 181751Z

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IS THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF ANY IDENTIFIABLE GROUP IN ITALY, AND THE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS FOR THOSE STILL IN THE UNIVERSITY ARE EQUALLY BAD. THIS IS DUE IN PART TO THE DEGENERATION OF THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM TO THE POINT THAT ITS DEGREES ARE, IN MOST FIELDS, VIRTUALLY WORTHLESS AS CERTIFICATES OF ACCOMPLISHMENT. IT IS ALSO, IRONICALLY, DUE TO THE PRESENT LABOR LAWS (PASSED AS A RESULT OF STUDENT AND WORKER DISTURBANCES IN 1969) WHICH PROTECT THE EMPLOYED AT THE EXPENSE, ESPECIALLY, OF THE FIRST JOB SEEKER. THE RESULT OF ALL OF THESE FACTORS, IN COMBINATION, HAS BEEN A BELLIGERENT ALIENATION OF THE EDUCATED YOUNG VIS-A-VIS SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 ROME 08174 02 OF 02 181805Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 8174

5. EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE: OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE OR STIMULATION IS A SUBJECT FOR ENDLESS SPECULATION. IT HAS BEEN COMMON IN THE PAST TO ATTRIBUTE MAJOR INCIDENTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE TO THE FASCISTS, AIDED AND ABETTED BY THE CIA. WITH THE PCI'S ABOUT FACE, THESE STORIES ARE NOW HARD TO FIND AND NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY ANYBODY. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, MANY WHO BELIEVE THAT THE CURRENT POLITICAL TERRORISM IS BEING SUPPORTED BY INTELLIGENCE SERVICES FROM THE EAST. THE USUAL ACCUSATION IS THAT THE CZECHS ARE BEHIND IT AT THE INSTIGATION OF THE USSR. THERE ARE TWO, NOT ENTIRELY CONSISTENT EXPLANATIONS FOR THIS ALLEGED CZECH ACTION: (A) TO CREATE A STATE OF CHAOS (THE "STRATEGY OF TENSION" IS THE ITALIAN PHRASE) SUCH THAT A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY (INCLUDING THE PCI) LIKE THAT EXISTING IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II WILL BE THE OBVIOUS ANSWER TO DEAL WITH SUCH A GRAVE PROBLEM. (B) THE OTHER EXPLANATION IS THAT THE USSR WANTS

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PAGE 02 ROME 08174 02 OF 02 181805Z

TO CUT THE CPI DOWN TO SIZE BEFORE IT GETS COMPLETELY CORRUPTED INTO A WESTERN SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PARTY (WITH BOVIOUS IMPLICATIONS, BY WAY OF EXAMPLE, FOR EASTERN EUROPE) AND HAS CHOSEN THIS METHOD TO RECALL THE PCI TO ORTHODOXY OR TO WEAKEN ITS MORE "WESTERN, DEMOCRATIC" ELEMENTS. WE ARE, UNHAPPILY, NOT IN A POSTION TO EVALUATE WHETHER OR TO WHAT EXTENT THE CZECHS OR OTHERS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED. IT DOES, HOWEVER, SEEM OBVIOUS, EVEN TO THE NON-EXPERT, THAT GIVEN THE AMOUNT OF MONEY, ARMAMENT (E.G., HAND GRENADES AND MACHINE GUNS), COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT, ORGANIZATION, ETC., THAT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN SOME OF THE RECENT INCIDENTS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE ENTIRELY THE WORK OF INNOCENT, IF DISAFFECTED, STUDENTS TAKING AN AFTERNOON OFF FROM SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY.

6. HOW SERIOUS IS IT: THE SITUATION IS OBVIOUSLY VERY SERIOUS, BUT IT SEEMS UNLIKELY (AT THIS TIME) THAT IT WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD TO THE POINT OF A VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF THE STATE. THIS PREDICTION IS BASED MORE ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE REACTION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC THAN ON ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE REAL STRENGTH OF THE VIOLENT OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME. THE PUBLIC USED TO BE TOLERANT OF FREQUENT PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS -- OCCASIONALLY THEY WERE GOOD THEATER, BUT MORE IMPORTANT THEY SELDOM TOUCHED OR THREATENED THE INTERESTS OF THE AVERAGE CITIZEN. THIS IS NO LONGER TRUE; THE AVERAGE CITIZEN FEELS CONSTANTLY THREATENED BY COMMON CRIMINALS AND BY POLITICAL VIOLENCE. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE FIRST (ESPECIALLY BURGLARS) HAVE REACHED THE POINT THAT IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE IN ROME TO BUY INSURANCE AGAINST THEFT FROM ONE'S HOME. POLITICAL VIOLENCE THREATENS THE LIVES AND PROPERTY OF EVERYONE. THE PUBLIC REACTION WAS DEMONSTRATED LAST SATURDAY AFTERNOON; A WELL-PUBLICIZED DEMONSTRATION LEFT THE CENTER OF ROME EMPTY OF ROMANS AND OF PARKED CARS (FAVORITE TARGETS FOR BURNING IN STREET
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PAGE 03 ROME 08174 02 OF 02 181805Z

DEMONSTRATIONS) ON THE FAVORITE FAMILY SHOPPING DAY OF THE WEEK. THUS, THE PUBLIC, FOLLOWED BY ALL OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, EXCEPT FOR THE RADICALS AND EXTREMIST GROUPS ON THE FAR LEFT, HAS CLEARLY SAID "ENOUGH." RATHER THAN IDENTIFYING WITH THE DEMONSTRATORS, AS OFTEN HAPPENED WHEN MUSSOLINI WAS ON HIS WAY TO POWER, THE PUBLIC IS DOING THE OPPOSITE.

7. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE: OVERALL, RECENT POLITICAL VIOLENCE, HAS PROBABLY PUSHED THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM SOMEWHAT TO THE RIGHT IN REACTION TO WHAT THE PUBLIC SEES AS A THREAT FROM THE LEFT. IT HAS WITHOUT DOUBT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED THE CPI'S INTERNAL PROBLEM RESULTING FROM THE DIVERGENCE OF VIEWS BETWEEN THE PARTY BASE AND ITS LEADERSHIP. THE PCI HAS DEPENDED TO AN IMPORTANT DEGREE FOR ITS SUPPORT (AS WELL AS ITS REGULAR GROWTH) ON THE YOUNGEST MEMBERS OF THE ELECTORATE. THEIR PERMANENT ALIENATION WOULD SERIOUSLY WEAKEN THE PARTY. IT HAS ALSO DEALT A SERIOUS BLOW TO THE NEW RADICAL PARTY (PR) WHICH SHOWED SIGNS OF GROWING AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PCI AND PSI. THE PR HAS BEEN EXPLICITLY NON-VIOLENT AND NON-COMMUNIST, AND HAS ATTRACTED ATTENTION AS A CHAMPION OF DIVORCE AND ABORTION LEGISLATION. ITS DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN LAST WEEK'S VIOLENCE, IN COMPANY WITH LOTTA CONTINUA AND AVANGUARDIA OPERAIA, HAS SERIOUSLY TARNISHED ITS IMAGE. THE PSI WILL PROBABLY ALSO SUFFER BECAUSE IT APPEARS TO BE THE ONE

DEMOCRATIC PARTY THAT IS OUT OF STEP WITH THE OTHERS,
AND WITH PUBLIC OPINION. NEEDLESS TO SAY, IT WILL ALSO
GIVE THE DC ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW THAT IT CAN
GOVERN WELL, IN A SITUATION IN WHICH IT HAS THE SYM-
PATHY AND SUPPORT OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC.
FOR THE SHORT-TERM, IT MAY ENABLE THE DC TO COME OUT OF
THE PRESENT NEGOTIATIONS FOR A "PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD" IN
BETTER SHAPE THAN IT OTHERWISE MIGHT HAVE.

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PAGE 04 ROME 08174 02 OF 02 181805Z

8. IN SUMMARY, IT DOES NOT NOW APPEAR THAT THE VIOLENCE
WILL GET OUT OF HAND. NEVERTHELESS, THE POTENTIAL FOR
RENEWED VIOLENCE WILL REMIAN AND WILL CONTINUE TO
BE A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT AND
SOCIETY. ITS POTENTIAL FOR DESTRUCTION WOULD INCREASE
SHARPLY IF ITALY SHOULD SUFFER A SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC
RECESSION AS A RESULT OF WHICH THE FRUSTRATED STUDENTS
WOULD BE JOINED (AS THEY WERE IN 1969) BY LARGE NUMBERS
OF FRUSTRATED WORKERS.
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Message Attributes

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